

MIJALĀ



Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar

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A Short Story Collection

Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar

Translated from the Nepal Bhasa by
Professor Dr. Tej Ratna Kansakar



NEWA AMERICAN DABU
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FOREWORD

Mijalā is a collection of short stories in Nepal Bhasa by Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar and published by Luja in 1970.

On behalf of Newa American Dabu and myself, I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Tej Ratna Kansakar for translating *Mijalā* into English and Prof. Dr. Sundar Krishna Joshi for his review of *Mijalā* (dazzling flame), and Professor Nirmal Man Tuladhar for his invaluable suggestion and advice.

We would also like to thank Mr. Keshar Man Tamrakar, the former President of Newa American Dabu, for coordinating this translation and publication project.

I would also like to recap in 2017 Newa American Dabu was honored with the Chittadhar Sirpā in recognition of their contributions to preservation of the Newa culture, publication of a literary annual journal, *Chicago Newa*, and works of leading Newa writers including promotion of Nepal Bhasa and literature.

We are deeply indebted to Mr. Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar for allowing us to publish his stories in this form.

Uday Maharjan
President
Newa American Dabu
June 15, 2019

Translator's Note

Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar is recognized as one of the foremost writers in Nepal Bhasa. The recognition and acclaim he has achieved as a novelist and a writer of essays and short stories have prompted me to translate his works into English so that his literary publications could be extended to new readers through the medium of these English translations.

When I decided to translate Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar's short stories into English, I was motivated by my admiration for his narrative style and his choice of themes and topics that faithfully reflect the issues and problems of contemporary Newar society. Although Hitkar is known primarily as a writer of descriptive and narrative prose, his reputation as a writer and a critic has certainly proved himself as a gifted and very productive writer. The present collection of short stories reflect his discerning and critical views on certain negative trends that have currently damaged the prestige and traditional harmony that had prevailed among the Newar population of the Kathmandu valley since ancient times. In this respect, the writer Hitkar should be recognized as a social critic and a voice of the present generation.

The task of translating these short stories has not been a difficult exercise mainly due to the logical sequence of the narratives, and the simplicity and clarity of his prose style. Since most of his stories are based on real life events and experiences, he succeeds in describing vividly the physical and emotional impact on the characters. Professor Sundar Krishna Joshi, in his Review of this collection of short stories has rightly pointed out that Hitkar's narrative style, plot structure and presentation of the climax are impressive as well as effective. I can only hope that Hitkar will continue to exercise his talent as a writer to delight his readers.

Professor Dr. Tej Ratna Kansakar

June 15, 2019

*Dedicated to my dearest late
life partner and our beloved children.*

* * * * *

Nitkar

A Critical Review of "Mijalā (Dazzling Flame)" a collection of Short Stories by Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar.

Professor Dr. Sundar Krishna Joshi

The short story writing in Nepal Bhasa from the very first story "Pau" (The Letter) published by Chittadhar 'Hridaya' in the first volume of "Dharmodaya" to the collection of short stories "Agimatha" and "Mijalā (Dazzling Flame)" by Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar marks the development of prose fiction in Nepal Bhasa literature. This is indeed a matter of satisfaction as this trend provides a firm basis for further scope in the proliferation of the narrative genre in the language. Although the poet Siddhidās had composed three volumes of didactic prose, namely 'Sapta Mitra', 'Sapta Satru' and 'Sapta Stuti', these cannot be properly classified as modern short stories.

Among the four schools of Nepal Bhasa literature, the development of literary works in prose preceded the output in poetry. Commenting on the publication "Lalitavistara" compiled by Venerable Nishthānanda Vajrācharya in Nepal Sambat 1034 (1914 AD), Chittadhar 'Hridaya' wrote his comments as follows:

".....because the spoken language differs radically from that of the written language, there was a distinct decline of interest in the

use of Nepal Bhasa. This publication has attempted to correct this trend by using the written language in the same way as its spoken form. This practice has served to create greater interest in the use of Nepal Bhasa as a living language as well as to promote new genres of literature....." (Jhigu Sāhitya: p.27)

The major literary works in Nepal Bhasa produced in N.S. 1035 include Jagat Sundar Malla's translation of Aesop's fables in simple Nepal Bhasa, and Siddhidas Amatya's "Shivavilās" stories which inspired the development of prose literature in the language among the works of various writers including Hitkar Kansakar. The present collection of his stories 'Mijalā (Dazzling Flame)' clearly illustrate his own narrative style in the formation of plot and the presentation of the characters in narrative prose. As mentioned above, the publication of Chittadhar's collection of six stories in N.S. 1067 (1947 AD) was the earliest publication which generated a host of past and contemporary writers. Although Chittadhar is known first and foremost as a renowned poet, he is also acknowledged as the pioneer writer of short stories. The first story titled 'Pau' (The letter) is a touching narrative of a Newar merchant who leaves his home and his family to establish business relations in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. The traumatic experiences of his wife with their new born child are vividly described especially in the tragic climax of the story. This story in particular has influenced the narrative style and plot structure of many writers in Nepal Bhasa, especially in the psychological presentation of characters.

Although writers like Phatte Bahādur, Purna 'Pathik', Tirthalāl Na: Gha: Bhani are known as story writers, the stories of Hitkar Bir Singh differ in the construction of plot, presentation of characters and effective use of language. The stories with unexpected or surprise ending will appeal to the reader, but a second reading will have its negative impact. In other words, any literary work should seek to represent the reality of life, not a contrived sequence of events that lead

to unnatural or unrealistic climax. The other Newar writers like Ram Shekhar, Ms Prakash, MadhavLal Karmacharya and others however have attempted to move away from this trend to present psychological depth of characters in their stories. The focus on characterization is evident in the other stories in this volume including 'Pannā Prasād Joshi: A Father figure', 'Kavitā', 'Thunder Bolt', and 'Disguised Morality'. Further, two or three of his stories in this volume are based on real life incidents such as the collapse of the balcony during a marriage procession in 'Kavitā', the motor-cycle accident which caused the death of Panna Prasad Joshi, the tragic life of the writer Siddhidas, and the plane accident that caused the death of a young pilot in 'Crimson Sky'. The writer Hitkar has also displayed his ability to create highly emotional situations as in 'Sister Bandanā', 'Sorrowful life', and 'Disguised Morality' which also highlight his poetic sensibilities.

If we are to regard sex and sexuality as an integral part of life, this obviously will be one of the central themes in literature. The writers however need to treat sex in a disciplined and acceptable manner. In this context, the writer Hitkar Bir Singh, while opposed to immoral treatment of sex, has treated sexual matters in a light-hearted and attractive manner.

In another context, Hitkar is strongly opposed to those individuals who wear the saffron robes of Buddhist monks and commit social and moral crimes. In a previous collection of his short stories, he had exposed such crimes in a story titled 'The price of a monk's robe'. The present story on 'Disguised Morality' is an extension of the similar theme where the monk named Kalyān raped an unmarried novice of the monastery. The writer here has raised his voice once again that such immoral individuals need to be severely punished for such crimes which are often hidden from public knowledge.

Finally, I would like to discuss briefly the role of language style in the development of modern literature in Nepal Bhasa. When one tells a story based on his/her reading, the narrator's oral style will most probably prevail over the written script. Similarly, when a story is narrated by two persons the listeners will perceive the content of each presentation in a different way. The multitude of people in this world do not have similar facial features, and this is also true of language style of individual writers. No two persons speak or write in an identical style because language style is unique to each individual. However, the epic titled "Lalita Vistar" on the life of the Buddha is a translation from the Pāli language by Pundit Nisthananda who has been able to capture the content as well as the style of the original text. Regarding the matter of language style in narrative prose, the Newar writer Purna 'Pathik' deserves special mention. His use of colloquial Newar representing dialect variations, idiomatic expressions and coinage of new words in his stories are remarkably impressive. Pathik, in this way, has not only attracted readers but also enriched the expressive potential of the Newar language. Another writer of stories and essays Nhuchhesundar Tuladhar can be singled out as the writer who had opposed the use of Sanskritized or Nepali words in Newar literature, and confined his writings to the use of native Newar language. The impact of this trend can also be seen in the works of the novelist Iswarānanda and the present story writer Hitkar Kansakar. Another well-known story writer Mādhavlāl Karmāchārya, whose refined prose style supersedes other writers like Iswarānanda and Hitkar as well, had also contributed to the development of this purist movement in the use of language in Newar literature. In this scenario, we need to recognize Hitkar's efforts to promote not only narrative literature but also to revive the native character of the Newar language. His description of the psychological depth of characters in emotional situations has proved to be impressive as well as effective. I am confident that he will continue to be inspired to write many more stories to delight his readers.

Crimson Sky

Sundarijal – the garden of Heaven, the treasure house of Nature, the language of Art. A picnic is being held today at this place. Everyone is in a joyful mood. Time is passing by, and the clock struck 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Tārā Kumāri was in a hurry and returned from the picnic site without informing anyone. Her behavior that day surprised everyone. She had left abruptly after eating only some snacks, and this naturally offended her friends. Tara Kumari however was least concerned about her friends' feelings as she was extremely happy that day. As she was returning in a jeep, she was overcome by great sense of joy and happiness.

The driver was driving at a normal speed. Tara Kumari was fondling her two years old daughter's head. The child smiled as her mother caressed her hair and kissed her. She then embraced the child when the baby began to weep. The driver gave a momentary glance while she patted and breast-fed the child. She was impatient to reach home, but the jeep was moving rather slowly. She looked at her watch which indicated past four thirty. Though she wished to reach home soon, she was reluctant to tell the driver to hurry up. She smiled as she seemed to recollect the pleasant memories of the past. She remembered her marriage to him three years ago and the rituals of the marriage ceremony. Her head bowed down and touched the child's head as she recollected the happy event. She was startled when the driver sounded

the horn. She realized they had reached home. She picked up her child and went upstairs.

She left the sleeping child in her mother's room and went to wash her face in the bathroom. She first washed her hands and before washing her face, she looked at her face in the mirror hanging on the wall. The 'tikā' mark on her forehead reminded her of their wedding ritual. She also remembered the red powder her husband had placed on her hair at the final wedding ritual at the temple. She then washed her face with soap three or four times, and scrubbed her legs clean. As she had visible hair on her legs like the men, she felt like shaving them off, but instead she pulled up her saree and washed her legs again. She then went to the room where her child was sleeping and her mother was busy sewing. As Tara Kumari seemed to be unusually happy that day, her mother asked her why. With a smile on her face she replied, "Oh he is arriving today!"

"He is arriving today! What, without any information! Her mother asked in surprise. "No mother, he told me so on the day he left for Biratnagar", she replied while drying her legs. She had also received a telegram from her husband that he would arrive home today. She was thus very confident that he would. She was proud to be the wife of a famous pilot, especially because he is to be promoted to the post of Captain Day after tomorrow. The couple is respected wherever they go. Her husband had flown the plane to all the airports in the country, and two flights to Bombay. They live in a modern high-rise building, and a garden with flowers and fruit trees. They own many electric and electronic goods including transistors, tape recorders, watches and clocks, cameras, and audio-visual equipment. That day Tara Kumari was more than happy in anticipation of her husband's return.

She sat on her make-up chair to beautify herself. She combed her black, silky hair, put on her lipstick and eyebrows, and removed a red

sāree that her husband particularly liked from the cupboard and wore it. After dressing up, she washed the face of her child and applied dark eyebrows. She then applied a sweet-smelling hair-oil and massaged the child's hair. The child now looked like a living doll. The child's face closely resembled that of her father, and nothing compared to her mother. She then recalled their conflicting relationship prior to the birth of the child. He had been ill-tempered shortly after their marriage, especially on trivial matters like untasted food and leaving home without any information. He had left for Pokhara less than three months after their marriage without telling her. She was depressed, had no appetite for any food and spent sleepless nights. Later her father and mother-in law compelled her to go to Pokhara. She tried to please her husband in any way she could at the cost of her own comfort and health. She was in advanced pregnancy then and gave birth to a daughter in Pokhara. Following the birth of their daughter, he never left her out of his sight. She was very surprised by this behavior. He even used to chase her around whenever she tried to hide from him. If he does not see her for a day, he is very upset and annoyed. In this way she gradually came to understand his character. She stayed there for about six months and returned to Kathmandu.

This was about a matter of a week ago. That day he had to go to Biratnagar. She was then pregnant. He was deeply in love with her and did not allow her to do any house duty. On the day of his departure he kissed her goodbye as was his habit and she was always willing to fulfill all his wishes. This was their habitual behavior whenever he leaves or arrives home. But that day, he had a worried look on his face. He stood there motionless as if he had forgotten something. He gazed at his wife with a long, lingering look, and she noticed tears in his eyes. This prompted her own tears as she stood there like a dumb woman.

"That day he had reached her to her parents' home. He comforted her with words of assurance that he will be back soon. On the fourth

day of his arrival in Biratnagar he dispatched to her sarees and shoes of the latest designs, especially ordered from Benares in India. She was overjoyed by his expression of loving kindness, and his plan to return from Biratnagar that day. She hoped he would not come to her parents' home to fetch her and return with his arms around her shoulder in broad daylight. She felt very embarrassed with the neighbors looking on."

She was lost in her thoughts while dressing up her child. She did not realize that she had put on the child's dress inside out and she corrected her carelessness when her mother pointed out her mistake. At that moment she heard the repeated sound of a vehicle horn. She hurried down the stairs thinking that perhaps her husband had already arrived. She saw her brother-in-law standing in front of the car and was disappointed. She then noticed that he was sweating profusely and this alarmed her. Her suspicion was aroused, and her blood pressure suddenly increased. She then managed to ask, "What about him?"

"No, elder brother has not arrived yet I have come to call you as my mother is seriously ill with stomach cramps. Father has been urging me to go at once, but I am late as I could not find a vehicle on time. But you must come immediately" he said in a hoarse voice. Tara Kumari recovered from her confused state of mind, her fears and suspicions, and said "I will go up and inform my mother and come down immediately." She kept wondering why the servant girl Kanchhi had not come to call her as she usually did when any member of the family suffered from health problems like high blood pressure or pneumonia. She felt restless and overcome with anxiety as her husband had not yet arrived as promised. He perhaps lied to her..."

Tara Kumari's mind was in a topsy-turvy state with disturbing thoughts. She bowed down to her mother's feet, picked up the child and hurried down the stairs. As soon as she sat on the front seat, the

vehicle sped away while her sighs and involuntary expressions were lost in the wind.

A short while later, they arrived at her husband's house. This used to be a pleasant locality, but today it had an atmosphere of deserted gloom which seemed to mock her. As she got down from the car hurriedly her saree got slightly torn, but she ignored the inquisitive stares of her neighbors and went up hurriedly. As she reached the fourth floor where her mother-in-law was lying down, her father-in-law placed his fingers to his lips to signal to her not to speak loudly. After bowing down to her father-in-law, she removed her shoes. The door was closed but she could hear the muffled sound of her mother-in-law crying out in pain. Her father-in-law came close and whispered to her, "She fell asleep only a moment ago after a morphine injection."

Her sister-in-law then came in, took the child in her arms and led Tara Kumari to her room. As soon as she entered the room she seemed to smell something pungent. She found that many changes had been made to her room. There was dust everywhere, and the flowers in the vase had dried up with a foul smell. She picked up the flowers and threw them out of the window. Her dresses and the child's clothing's were lying on the floor as she had left them. Her cosmetic items like talcum powder, saree, inner garments and the child's clothes were lying on the floor just as she had left them. Her husband's clothes on the bed appeared to be discarded items thrown away next to a cremation ground, and his dark coat on the hanger looked like a dangling evil spirit. She then hurriedly placed everything in their proper places.

Tara Kumari surveyed all the personal objects and decorations in the room. The new Godrej almirah looked old and dirty. She stood up with a piece of cloth to clean it, but she sat down abruptly. She then saw a piece of paper on the top of the table, unfolded it and recognized the unsent letter she had written pleading to her husband to return

soon. She gazed at the large photograph of her husband hanging on the wall as she recalled their intimate love life. Her active imagination however failed to distinguish between reality and fantasy, and this brought tears to her eyes. Although the photograph then appeared to be blurred, she was somewhat satisfied. At that moment she heard subdued conversation outside the room. She listened intently, but was annoyed as she could not understand what they were talking about. She lay down on the bed and reflected, "I was called because my mother-in-law was seriously ill, but I have not been allowed to meet her. They have perhaps deceived me". With this thought, she got up from the bed, hurried to the room where mother-in-law was kept, opened the door and went in. She heard her exclaim in a sorrowful voice, "My dearest oneOh, the love of my life!"

She was shocked by the apathy of all those family members who had lied to her. She could not tolerate this falsehood and began to weep. Her father-in-law and all the members of her husband's family tried to console her but she rejected their sympathy. She continued to weep as others simply looked on helplessly.

Her father-in-law then said in a stern voice, "Look, what kind of a person are you! The news affects us as much as it does to you. Don't you realize that all of us are weeping too? How can any of us remain unmoved when our dearest son is in a critical condition? Women have a soft heart and they cannot control their grief, but as you can see there are no tears in my eyes. The facts of the matter are as followswe have been told that the plane was piloted by his friend with a full load of government goods. Shortly after take-off, the plane was grounded. Just this afternoon, I received a telegram with the news that the plane was partially damaged, and the two passengers who suffered fractured limbs are being treated but they will be airlifted to Kathmandu for further treatment at the Shanta Bhawan Hospital. I shall send you to look after the patient properly. If needed, reputed doctors will be

consulted for effective treatments. I am prepared to spend my entire fortune for the full recovery of my dear son."

Tara Kumari then gradually ceased to weep and controlled her trembling body. While her sisters-in-law stayed with her, father-in-law went to look after his wife. Tara Kumari however could not sleep a wink the whole night despite their efforts to make her sleep. She sighed frequently as she kept looking at her sleeping child, and gazing at the photo-frame of her husband with tears in her eyes. A general feeling of weakness overcomes her throughout the night. When she hears the chirping of swallows and cock crows she gets up quickly and opens the window hoping to see the dawn of a new day. But she is disappointed and returns to her seat with a heavy heart, and yet she is unable to sleep. She continued to visualize in her mind the pain her husband must be suffering at this time. She became more and more impatient for the daylight of morning.

She opened the window again and looked out. All she could see were empty streets and rows of dark houses. There were no lights on lamp posts and the sky was overcast with dark clouds. As she kept gazing at the slowly moving clouds, she seemed to visualize a likeness of her husband's face. She also heard, real or imaginary, the sound of footsteps on the dark road but she could not see anyone. A certain sense of fear gripped her mind. She closed the window quickly and let out a soft scream. Her sisters-in-law sleeping in the next room were awakened and rushed to her room. While they consoled her by massaging her hair with soft words, a new morning finally dawned.

It was 8 o' clock in the morning. Tara Kumari along with her father-in-law, brother-in-law and sisters-in-law got into a vehicle and rushed to the air-port. They reached the air-port in record time. Tara Kumari carried a flower garland in her hand, while others too waited with flower garlands for the arrival of the plane.

The air-port is an open space, but appeared to be congested with the air traffic control building in the center, and groups of people including the Captain, Pilot, Co-Pilot, and Air Hostess waiting to receive the injured pilot. There were also other people waiting with rice grains, red powder and flower garland But all of them appeared to be gloomy and sad. Tara Kumari felt weak and the air-port seemed to spin around in her mind's eye. She however managed to maintain control of herself.

They then heard the vibrating sound of a plane approaching, and immediately landed on the air field. Tara Kumari felt a hint of joy on arrival of the plane. They then led Tara Kumari to the front of the plane. She heard someone say, "She is the wife of the pilot." On hearing these words, she came to a standstill. As she was about to turn around, a big box carried by four men was unloaded. As the box was placed on the ground, someone opened its cover. Tara Kamal was terrified by what she saw. She dropped the flower garland and was about to collapse. She shivered and clenched her teeth in extreme shock. The surroundings seemed to swim around her as she lost her self-control. She then closed her eyes in a paralytic state of mind and instantly collapsed on the concrete tarmac. The glass bangles that her husband had placed on her hands were shattered. Droplets of saliva emerged from her mouth like that of an epileptic patient, but her tears dried up like a rivulet in summer. Similarly, the slight drizzle instantly dried up on the concrete tarmac.

All nature: the Time, the Wind and the Earth seemed to be weeping in her sorrow. The group of people assembled there were in a state of shock, speechless and motionless.

Pannā Prasād Vaidya: A Father Figure

It was the 11th day of the month of Pouvsh. I was at home on that day due to an unavoidable work. The time was past 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I had hardly reached the fourth floor of my house to have some tea when my elder sister Keshari returned from her office and came up the stairs hurriedly in a breathless condition. She had a frightened look on her face and was in a state of shock. She then blurted out, "Elder brother Ashārām has met with a motor-cycle accident and has been taken to the hospital. I am told that Horā Prasād's father, the pillion rider, died two hours later, and Ashārām too is seriously injured and may not survive. I rushed to the hospital from the office to take stock of the situation and hurried home to inform you." She then related to me what she had heard and seen. I was deeply shocked to learn that Asharam had met with a fatal accident. My mouth dried up and I was speechless, but after a while I managed to ask, "Hora Prasad's father! Was he Panna Prasad Vaidya?" The elder sister replied, "Yes, the one who died is Panna Prasad Vaidya." I then could not contain myself, my blood pressure suddenly increased, my legs grew weak and seemed unable to support my body. I trembled in a confused state of mind, but managed to grab my coat and hurried out towards the hospital with my younger brother Sarvagya. Fortunately I managed to run without stumbling or falling while calling out to friends and acquaintances I met on the way: "Respected Vaidya has died in a motor cycle accident, I am told."

I lost my sense of reality as I hurried on with ever increasing steps. In my mind's eye I visualized Ashram's motor-cycle moving along the Exhibition road towards Singha Durbar with the old man Vaidya sitting behind him. Whenever Asharam seemed to increase speed, Vaidya would raise his voice and say, 'Asharam, slow down, slow down! There is no need to hurry.' In reply Asharam would say, 'Why would I drive fast, Vaidya Sir! Do not be afraid. As you can see, I am driving carefully.'

I remembered the two of them were very happy the other day with the prospect of meeting a minister to arrange a date for releasing Vaidya's life-time work on compiling a comprehensive Dictionary of Nepal Bhasa.

"The motor-cycle was moving on slowly. While gazing at the Exhibition ground, Vaidya made a protest remark, "This used to be a fertile area for growing crops and vegetables, but has now turned into a market place with ugly concrete buildings. Don't you think so, Asharam?" In response, Asharam smiled and replied, "Yes, I agree Vaidya Sir. Changes in time have brought unfavorable ways of life." They crossed the exhibition area and Asharam made a turn to the right while sounding the motor-cycle horn. At that moment, a vehicle of Education Ministry entered the road named Putalisadak at high speed as the occupants were late for an inaugural program. In an instant, the racing vehicle collided with Ashram's motor-cycle while Vaidya Sir and Asharam cried out in panic. They were both dismounted and thrown on the road. Vaidya Sir landed on his head and his thin, weak body collapsed on the hard surface of the road. His eyes flickered and flashed while streams of blood flowed out of his body. Asharam also suffered multiple wounds, and their faces turned bluish. They were unable to say anything, and instantly a multitude of people gathered around them like in a bee-hive. The situation at the moment was comparable to the passive onlookers at the fate of King Oedipus when

they remarked, "Oh, how unfortunate. Most probably, they will not survive." A passing vehicle then picked them up and deposited the two bleeding bodies at the Bir hospital. The motor-cycle that had reduced them to that tragic fate seemed to be symbolically repentant in silent tears.

Immediately on their arrival, the doctors and nurses attended to the two accident victims with first-aid treatments. The seriously injured Vaidya Sir cried out in agonized pain while the doctor was stitching the bleeding wounds. There was blood oozing out of his mouth, and with tears in his eyes he cried out in a state of delirium, "Asharam! Are you alright?" Someone next to him replied, "Asharam is not injured. He is in normal health, Vaidya Sir" and placed Asharam next to him. Vaidya Sir then cried out softly and moved his lips in inaudible last words when his heart stopped beating and left this world for good. Amazingly, at that very moment a violent earth tremor seemed to take place and the hospital staff and the patients were terrified while the ground shook below them and the entire building was filled with dust. The closed eyes of Vaidya Sir seemed to be gazing at the destructive spectacle and the terrified spectators.

"Panna Prasad Vaidya has passed away!" my father¹ said to me with a sorrowful face. I was very surprised to find myself in the hospital. I looked around me and saw a line of cars outside and a crowd of people inside with their heads bent down in deep sorrow. They stood there like a multitude of lifeless statues. The interior of the hospital then appeared to me as a cremation ground with mourners all around. I then entered the room where Asharam was kept with the help of a friend and my younger brother. This room too was crowded with people and they saw Asharam lying on a small bed with a contorted and tearful face. He was looking around at the people but unable to utter a single word. A short while later, he finally found his

¹ **Daya Bir Singh Kansakar**, chief founder of Paropakar organisation, renowned pioneer social worker and first blood donor of Nepal.

voice and expressed extreme sorrow on the tragic demise of a close friend and a renowned scholar. Asharam could not reconcile himself with the guilty feeling that he was to blame for this tragedy. I then tried to console him by saying that what happened was not his fault but an outcome of an inevitable misfortune. I pleaded with him to forget the incident, but he wiped his tears and replied, "How can I forget? The memory will haunt me as long as I live. I was the witness to the tragic end of my mentor."

A hospital attendant kept telling us that a crowd of people are not allowed within its premises. At that moment, my younger brother Prakash came in to inform us that the renowned poets of Nepal Bhasa Chittadhar 'Hridaya' and Durgalal Shrestha had arrived and were waiting outside. I then rushed out and asked them, "Will it be alright if we arrange a proper funeral procession tomorrow?" Chittadhar agreed and instructed Vaidya Sir's youngest son Hora Prasad Joshi to organize the funeral accordingly. He however replied, "Father used to go to bathe every day at the Kaalmochan river, and I would like to take his body there today for cremation. Why do we need to postpone it for tomorrow?" We were reluctant to go against his wishes, and as I was not satisfied with his decision I tried to convince him, but to no avail. Our intention was to organize an elaborate funeral procession befitting the passing away of an esteemed person, and I was quite depressed by his hasty decision.

It was early evening when I learnt that Chittadhar 'Hridaya' and Durgalal had sent someone to inform other litterateurs to join the funeral procession. That evening I was unable to make my daily visit to worship the deity at Kaalmochan. I was very depressed for missing the opportunity to see Vaidya Sir before he passed away.

I walked home slowly with a mental burden of having lost someone close to me. The first thing I did when I entered my room

was to look at a photograph of Vaidya Sir. It was a photograph taken of him speaking at the sixth Inter-college Literary Conference of Nepal Bhasa organized by Tribhuvan University. He was wearing yellow-colored Nepali dress with a waistcoat, a coat and a woolen cap. He was holding a walking stick tightly and the bony outline of his hand was clearly visible. He was short in stature but had a dignified personality.

While looking at the photograph I felt as if he was standing before me. I then remembered all the wise words he had spoken to me ---- "Hitkar, you are a learned person, and you write well. I would like you to help me to complete my work on the Dictionary I have compiled. I am now an old man and it is uncertain how long I will live ---- perhaps today, tomorrow! So, while there is still time, encourage me to reveal all that I know."

"I am fully willing to assist you in any way I can. At the present, however, I am preparing for my examination " Vaidya Sir, who never loses his temper, replied "I understand, but do not forget to see me after your exams. I hope you can come here regularly." In the past he used to come to my house as well while calling my name, but now he never will. His lifetime work in compiling the Nepal Bhasa Dictionary was yet to be completed but he will never see it in its published form. I did not even have the opportunity to show him the conference photograph I held in my hand.

I remembered the time Vaidya Sir came to my house a few days after my marriage. When I heard his voice I was totally ashamed that I had forgotten to invite him to my marriage feast. "Oh! How did I forget to invite him? I wonder what he had said about my carelessness!" However when I went to greet him he said in pretended anger, "So you got married and forgot to invite me, didn't you?"

"I completely forgot, Vaidya Sir!" I replied shamefully. "So I would like to invite you alone, will you accept?"

"No, no. I was only joking", he said while smoking a cigarette. Then the conversation changed to other matters and the subject of my marriage feast came to an end. But today I felt that he was teasing me ---- "So Hitkar, you promised to invite me alone for the feast, didn't you? I now realize that you are a liar." Yes, I accept that I am a liar. I had promised to invite him alone for the feast, and I failed to do so. I was tormented and frustrated but consoled myself with these thoughts ---- "I know that Vaidya Sir is incapable of expressing anger. Why should he be angry for my failure to invite him to a feast! But I know fully well that he would be angry with those who degrade our mother tongue Nepal Bhasa and call it 'Newari', and seek to defame and hinder the development of Nepal Bhasa.

But Vaidya Sir, when you were alive we failed to understand your potentials as a literary figure, but now that you have passed away we fully recognize your patriotic ideology. We are thus prepared to accept our misguided views and actions, and we also know that you will never curse us for our shortcomings in literary and social matters. In response to our confession, he would have replied, "Now you are talking like unprejudiced, rational individuals." Our response then would be, "No Vaidya Sir, we are not yet rational human beings who praise and worship a person only after his death. Can we truly call ourselves as human beings? Your Dictionary when published will keep your name alive. I will then tell others --- "Our Vaidya Sir has not expired. His name survives in this publication. His voice will continue to resound for all times."

Vaidya Sir is no more, but he has conquered death. He has transformed himself from mortal to immortal, from old age to youth and to the innocence of childhood. We thus experience his presence among us even after his passing away as a promoter and champion of his mother tongue Nepal Bhasa.

Kavitā

It was a small room with hardly enough space to lie down comfortably. It looked more like a miniature doll's room. What a dirty looking room with a dirt-stained mattress, a torn blanket and an ugly pillow stuffed with lumpy cotton! The whole room had a dirty look with rows of ants crawling all over the place, and appeared to be more like a dumping ground of rubbish heap. The room was not only unsightly but also smelt like a neglected urinal. Kavitā was amazed at the shabby condition of the room and did not feel like staying there a minute longer. However, she was locked in the room without a window for fresh air. The only ventilation in the room was a small opening covered with a net. She seemed to realize that she was imprisoned and left to be suffocated in this narrow space. She felt herself to be a victim of gross injustice,

She remained there motionless for a long time, resting her chin on her knees and shedding drops of tears. She looked around her with fearful eyes like a serpent with a mobile tongue, as if mentally prepared to knock down the wall and the door of the small hut which she imagined to be near a cremation ground. She remembered the incident that had taken place a short time ago But Kavita could hardly believe it to be true. Her past life was a part of history ! The reality of her life.....! Her days then would have been a happy one, but that memorable day proved to be a turning point in her life. She seemed

to hear the sound of a traditional assemble of 5-piece instruments, and the noisy brass band at a marriage procession. She experienced a mixed emotion of anxiety and pleasure. When the procession reaches the groom's house a ritual welcome would be performed, and the house will be crowded with spectators. I would be made to sit next to my would-be husband with a hand on his shoulder. A peculiar sensation would run through my body while someone teases me in suggestive words, "You would like to sit upright when you are in the room with your husband this evening. Why do you need to bow down so low now?" An attractive room decorated with sweet-smelling flowers was given to them that very evening. Her husband entered the room, closed the door, sat down next to her and embraced her to express his passionate love for his new wife.

Kavita however was not filled with joy and satisfaction the next morning. The incomplete story of her life remained in her mind and the memory of her sorrowful experiences brought tears to her eyes --- the very same image, the very same event and the very same history. She closed her eyes and shook her head to dispel the disturbing images but to no avail. Then in a loud voice she cried out, "Mother! Elder sister!" and collapsed on the floor in a semi-conscious state. All these images however seemed to be nothing more than a figment of her imagination.

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It was afternoon the next day. The street outside was neat and clean. The decorations and the red welcome banner were fluttering in the breeze. The two auspicious vessels placed on either side of the door seemed to be waiting to welcome the new bride. A group of people was assembled there together with a multitude of onlookers at doors, windows and shops. Then all of them heard the sound of the procession band which promptly reached the house and the ritual to

welcome the bride began. The spectators after watching the welcome ceremony also watched with much curiosity the bridal gifts in the car. Many of them complimented the new bride as a very fortunate woman while groups of photographers clicked their cameras to record the event. Since the groom was also in the car with the new bride, his friends began to tease him for his reluctance to leave her even for a few minutes. This remark made everyone laugh.

At that moment it seemed that a violent earthquake shook the houses and men began to shout and women screamed when some of them with children were thrown down from old collapsed houses. Everyone gathered there scattered and fled in different directions. Those wounded were crying out for help but no one was prepared to do so. The bridegroom then rushed out of the car to assist the wounded in the midst of many victims shouting and weeping loudly. While some were limping, a few others who were seriously wounded were weeping in the midst of three victims who had passed away when a house collapsed on them. Among them was a young girl who was preparing to sit for her final B.Sc. examinations that year and also confirmed to be married the next year.

A short while later, another crowd of people gathered at the area which suffered maximum damage to provide assistance. Some of the wounded were carried away to the hospital, but no one dared to touch the dead persons. There was blood all over the place, and they saw corpses with wide open eyes and mouths, and blue-colored faces. They were happy and smiling some time ago but now reduced to corpses. What a horrifying scene!

Kavita at this time was looking around at the tragic spectacle. She felt that her life had been overturned, and was grievously offended when she heard some women in the crowd say, "this bride seems to be most inauspicious --- perhaps she is a witch sent here with an evil

design. It is she who must have caused this terrible accident and killed so many people. What a despicable woman! "An old injured woman then cried out, "It is a curse even to look at her face! She deserves to be buried right here."

Another elderly woman however said in reply, "You should not accuse an innocent bride like her without any evidence. Some people were injured or killed because the old houses with crowds of people collapsed on them. No one can be blamed for the damage and death in a catastrophe like this. If you remember, a similar event had occurred two years ago at the Ason locality during the chariot festival of three grandmother goddesses. Who was to be blamed then --- the goddesses? It is unwise to make baseless accusations.

Kavita, while listening to their conversations, closed her ears and began to weep. Her emotional outburst overpowered her and she was unable to think or speak in a rational manner. Due to the humiliations she faced, she did not wish to stay there a minute longer. At that moment she heard someone say, "Her sister-in-law, I am told, is in a serious condition, not likely to live." She was shocked and her whole body trembled in cold sweat. Her mouth dried up, and at that moment the match-maker lady grabbed her in embrace and tried to console her. Kavita continued to hold the lady's hand tightly.

About two hours later, Kavita was taken into the house through another door as the main gate of the house was damaged in the house collapse. Her mother-in-law could not control her tears as she welcomed the new bride as if in a death ritual function rather than a joyful occasion. She did not even look at the face of her daughter-in-law and cursed her for bringing ill-fortune and disgrace on the family. The newly married couples were deeply hurt by their mother's unfair accusations and they too began to weep. Who would have imagined that a universally happy event such as a wedding is suddenly transformed into a bitterly sorrowful experience!

The family was then compelled to organize the marriage feast on that very day as they had already made all the necessary arrangements. It was not only the wastage of food, but all the invitation cards have been delivered a few days in advance. It however turned out that very few invitees attended the feast in view of the unfavorable circumstances. The few people who did come did not feel that they were attending a marriage feast. Many guests, especially the women, had tears in their eyes and all of them imagined that they had come there to express their condolences on the death of a family member. The new bride, they felt, had come there as a thorn to destroy the peace and happiness of the family.

* * * * *

Kavita got up abruptly, screamed in a subdued voice and strolled back and forth in the room. She grinded her teeth and her body trembled like a demoness. She snatched and threw away the mattress and the pillow, and stamped on them in a frenzy of anger and frustration. She longed to relate her sorrow to a kind-hearted person but there was none to listen or sympathize in her present condition. The atmosphere around her seemed to mock and accuse her as if an evil spirit had been sent to destroy her parent-in-laws and her own husband.

"Yes, I am an evil-minded person. My ultimate aim is to disgrace and exterminate all the members of this family. Not only that, I am determined to reduce this land to a cremation ground following a massive bloodshed. Do you realize who I am and what I am capable of? All of you will repent for the cruelty and injustice meted out to me. I will have my revenge on everyone who has humiliated me and caused mental torture." With this outburst of anger and frustration, she tore her clothes, threw away her gold ornaments, broke her glass bangles and banged her hands on the wall, while she breathed heavily in fits and starts.

She then remembered someone say that her sister-in-law was in a critical condition, and she began to weep in renewed sorrow. All the objects in the room seemed to mock her as silent witnesses to her frustrations. She visualized the rows of wounded, dying and dead people in the hospital. The mental images of innocent suffering people frightened her.

Kavita did not wish to remain in her in-laws' house. She felt an acute sense of hunger but her mind was obsessed by the torture of anger, hatred and anxiety over her present predicament and her uncertain future. She imagined herself to be in the cremation ground and was horrified to visualize a still living person cremated on a burning pile of firewood. Her imagination at the time was beyond her rational control.

She heard someone unlock the door of her room. She was startled and glanced at the door cautiously. She reacted in fear as a man with long dirty hair entered the room. He was no other than her own husband Rudra. He however looked like a murderer with his flushed face and large eyes. He may have come there with a certain aim, be it good or evil, and he slammed the door shut. He kept gazing at his new wife with a cynical facial expression which kept changing like that of the Shakespearean character Light burn who came to assassinate King Edward the Second. He too looked like a blood-thirsty murderer. In a terrified state of mind, she was unable to utter any sound. An awesome image of Kaal Bhairav, the god of life and death, came to her mind as Rudra advanced towards her. With increasing heartbeat, her eye-sight became blurred and she almost collapsed to the ground. Rudra got hold of her dress and pulled her towards him. In the terrified state of her mind, she expected to be murdered in cold blood but to her great surprise he embraced and kissed her passionately. "My Kavita! My Kavita!! He exclaimed with a flow of tears in his eyes. She was awe-struck by his endearing behavior, and could not believe the

transformation in his character. She was unable to utter a single word, bent down on his lap and shed copious tears of joy.

"Don't weep, Kavita! Please do not weep. No one could have predicted that such a disaster would take place. For now, you need to remember that we were married on this day. You have suffered great physical and mental pain, and I promise to take revenge against all those who have caused this suffering on you." He held her hand, caressed her hair and said in a soft voice, "As long as we live together and have love for each other, we do not need to worry about those who intend to destroy our relationship. You and I, and our doll-like child. This will be the story of our life."

Kavita at this time was resting her head on his lap. She heaved a long sigh of relief and did not attempt to get up. Perhaps she had fallen asleep in a slumber of peace and happiness.

A Thunder Bolt

It was the month of Ashad, the month when the atmosphere is alive with the song of the rice-planting season. Fortunately the sky was clear that day – the day of full moon. I identified myself with the brightness of moonlight, but I lacked the form and the beauty of that natural glow. Although I had a voice, I considered myself to be voiceless. I may be a reflection of that moonbeam, the sole natural light of the night.

It was a small dilapidated house which I regard as a specimen of our culture with carved windows through which I entered with some difficulty. As soon as I stepped into the small room I was transported to the past and felt that I had been to this room several times before. My memories of the past tended to mock me. I closed my eyes and tried to link to my past experiences. I then suddenly realized that I was in the room of Siddhi Das the renowned poet of Nepal Bhasa. I then remembered listening to poetry recitations and numerous songs. At other times, I had seen him stooping on the floor and mumbling to himself while composing poetry.

The room however was in a very dirty state with objects scattered here and there including the numerous sheets of writing paper all over the floor. The dust and dirt falling down from the ceiling added to the unsightly condition of the room. How can anyone remain neat and

clean in such an environment! However, I have a personal attachment to this room. Whenever I enter this room, I feel a sense of well-being, and my mind is at peace.

I sat down cross-legged on the floor near a small elegant-looking table. On its top, a wick-lamp was burning steadily. Siddhi Das was sitting quietly on one side --- my Siddhi Das who was transformed into an old person without having experienced the joys of youth. His tall and thin body was apparently the result of his poor eating habits. His shabby dress appeared to be that of a workman with a dirty length of cloth around his waist. I have never seen him in a neat and clean dress. Apparently he did not have adequate income to eat and dress properly. The condition of his house too was degrading day to day. But despite these problems, he never complained or caused distress to his family. Unfortunately, his mother who loved him so much had passed away during his childhood. I really wonder how my Siddhi Das could tolerate all those problems! Whenever I see him in this pitiable condition, tears arise in my eyes and I feel like weeping openly.

He was busy writing something on a piece of paper and on the thin hand that held the pen I could see distinct lines of blue veins. He seemed to be lost in his thoughts like a sculptor contemplating his work of art. He however appeared to be tired with bloodshot eyes. His writings day in and day out must have exhausted his mind and his body. He had been engaged in such intensive concentration on his writing not merely for weeks and months but several years. The pen that he uses every day was his life, his soul.

In the corner near-by his wife Gangā Devi was asleep with the child on her lap. She could have slept more comfortably on her bed. Why does she continue to punish herself in this way! She woke up when Siddhi Das started to cough. She looked around her without a clear vision and murmured to herself, "Why does he continue to write

day and night in this way!" She however dozed off to sleep but the child she was breast-feeding began to weep. Perhaps the milk dried up as the child pulled at her nipple. "Auch!" she uttered and said, "This child will be the death of me. My breasts have been bitten time and again and are in a painful condition. What can I do if my body runs out of natural milk, and the child refuses to drink cow milk or powder milk!" She then applied a bitter-tasting mixture on her nipple, placed it in the child's mouth and said "Come and drink it!" The child however screamed loudly and continued to cry out as she slapped her child in anger.

Siddhi Das, who was engrossed in his writings, turned around and said to his wife in anger, "What kind of a person are you! How can the child understand this? Your temper cannot solve any problem. Give me the child!" He then grabbed the weeping child from her lap and tried to console it with soothing words in order to induce sleep. The child however continued to cry and would not sleep. I sat there unable to decide what to do. The mother herself was in a weak condition due to poor health. As she was unable to provide the required milk for her child, I was inclined to take the child on my lap and feed it with the milk from my own body. But I was unable to fulfill this instinct, and continued to stare at the father and child in a very worried state of mind.

In the meanwhile, I noticed that the child had fallen asleep on the lap of the father. He had obviously induced his child to sleep by reciting the Newar rhyming words in poetic meter. He kept gazing at the movements of the child's lips as if sucking the milk and listened to the sighs that emerged from within. He bent down and kissed the child while he caressed the small empty stomach. Gangā was amazed as she watched Siddhi Das put the hungry child to sleep by composing a poem as a lullaby.

Gangā, a patient of tuberculosis, had tears in her eyes. Her lean and thin body clearly lacked the strength to take care of her child. In fact, her health had further declined after the birth of her child. The medications too had failed to improve her health, and her frustrations clearly indicated that she would not survive this life-threatening disease. Her main regret was that she had been unable to take care of her husband and nurture her child. While gazing at her husband and the child, drops of tears rolled down her cheeks. Siddhi Das then spoke in a soft voice, “Gangā, do not lose heart. Our life has been a struggle, but as I have told you several times, we can maintain our life only by accepting the challenge. After all, happiness and sorrow are an integral part of life. We all have to die one day, but we need to survive in our after-life as well. As human beings, we must be prepared to face obstacles and sufferings. But we must have the courage to face these challenges, and this to my mind is the true meaning of life. There is no greater happiness than an awareness of eternal life. Understand this truth and try to avoid feelings of frustrations and hopelessness. So Gangā, do not weep! Your tears will only worsen your delicate condition. Have you taken your medicine?”

She rose up without answering his question, went forward and embraced her husband. She in fact had never embraced her husband in this way. She gave a quick glance at her sleeping child, laid her head on her husband's leg and began to shed copious tears. Siddhi Das caressed her hair and covered her body with a shawl. Ganga instantly fell asleep, and as he gazed at her sad face he too was overcome with tearful emotions. He kept looking at the child and wife, and kissed both of them with the passion of love and ecstasy. While watching this sorrowful scene, I too was left speechless. Meanwhile, Siddhi Das continued to mumble a few words, "this my child, this my beloved wife I have failed in my duties as a husband and a father. As a father, I have not been able to take proper care of our child, and as a

husband I could not provide medical treatment of my wife. Actually, I have neglected to look after my own health as well. I may have been reduced to a skeleton, but I am a victim of poverty and inspired by the challenge to fulfill my obligation to serve my mother-tongue. While this oppressive government is scheming to destroy our mother-tongue, how can I remain silent? How will history judge me if I do not raise my voice and fail to protest in my writings? We cannot allow our mother-tongue to be banned in speech and all forms of writing. So, why should I bow down to their immoral and illegal policy? We must unite and struggle to claim our right to use our mother tongue freely. We may be arrested and jailed but they cannot silence our united voice. If we succeed in preserving our mother-tongue, this united commitment will be our life-time achievement." Siddhi Das then looked at his sleeping wife and child and uttered, "My Gangā my child" and kissed them both as an expression of true love.

Siddhi Das then continued to mumble to himself, got hold of his pen and resumed writing his epic composition with the child and his wife sleeping on his lap and on his knees. While I watched him continue his writing in that uncomfortable position, I knew that it was already late at night and I got up to leave. I however suffered a seizure on both my legs, and I stood there for a while. I called out "Sidhi Das! Sidhi Das!" to inform him that I was leaving but there was no response as he too had fallen asleep with his head on the table. I did not wish to disturb his sleep but I felt that he would need to complete the Ramayana epic. I called him again but failed to get a response. I stood there puzzled, and I then realized that I did not have the ability to wake him up. I was annoyed with myself for my inability to communicate with him. If I could speak to him in his own language, he would have been pleased and rejoiced with laughter. I then left the room in a sorrowful mood.

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I reached his house again on the third day. I did not feel comfortable when I arrived in his room which although dirty-looking had an attractive atmosphere. May be I had entered another room by mistake, but it was indeed the room of Siddhi Das. There was no light in the room and everything was in a topsy-turvy condition. The calendar, photos on the wall, the pen and papers on the floor as in a house of mourning. Siddhi Das, his wife Gangā and the child --- where have they gone to? I was amazed by these sudden changes. I went from room to room to look for them but could not find them anywhere. I was dazed and my feet became unsteady. I was terrified when I heard some people outside speaking softly. At that moment I heard a dog howling in a fearful manner. My mind at the time was like a deflated balloon at the very end of life. I seemed to smell the smoke from a cremated corpse. I immediately ran out towards the cremation ground and saw a corpse being cremated. The smoke from the fire was rising in spiraling loops. I however could not believe my own eyesight. Being emotionally charged, I felt like weeping as tear drops blurred my vision.

At the cremation ground the corpse of Gangā Devi, the better half of Siddhi Das, was being consumed by flames. The names of Siddhi Das, Gangā Devi and their child could be heard among the mourners assembled there. Many of them asked Siddhi Das to go home but he refused to leave. His father Laxmi Narayan took hold of his hand and tried to pull him away, but to no avail. He kept gazing at the fire as if he would jump into the flames. With a flow of tears from his eyes he continued to embrace his child while looking at the consuming flames. This obviously was his first experience of a tragic death of a loved one, and he learnt about the reality of life as a struggle.

A moment later, the child began to weep and cry out loudly, "I want my mama, where is my mama!" Siddhi Das could no longer contain himself as he closed his tearful eyes. The mourners at the

funeral too were overcome with sorrow as they looked on in grief and sympathy for the bereaved poet and his young child. Laxmi Narayan tried to get hold of the child but Siddhi Das backed away refusing to hand over the motherless child. In fact he would not allow anyone to touch his son.

Siddhi Das then lost control of himself and began to shout in a hysterical manner. The mourners looked on helplessly while Siddhi Das continued to weep, and words like "the mother of my son has passed away" kept repeating in his mind. Then suddenly he would shout out like a mad man, "No ... No, the mother of my child has not died. The spirit of my wife still lives within my child. Gangā is not dead, she still lives. Yes, she is yet alive." He would then laugh in a hysterical manner and exclaim, "Death! You cannot kill the soul of my Gangā. There is still time for you to accept defeat. If not.....If not.....!" he shouted like an insane person.

As if struck by lightning, he sat down abruptly on the sand. While gazing at his child's face, he seemed to see the image of Gangā reflected in his eyes. Being unable to control his emotions, he took the child in his arms, kissed him several times and caressed his head and face.

Siddhi Das then placed his index finger on the wet sand and continued to trace the letters: ---- My Gangā My Gangā! * * *

That Woman

That day was the last day of the Intermediate Examinations. It was the time of winter. The center was near to the Bishnumati River and we used to feel the cold wind. The school was fairly big, built like a palace with an open compound in the front where children can play freely. Many varieties of flowers were planted in rows on the four sides of the area. All the students were basking in the sun waiting for the bell to ring. The groups of young boys and girls as well as some elderly couples were enjoying themselves in the warmth of the sun. The others however were busy consulting their textbooks and discussing the subject matter or memorizing certain texts for the examination. Some of them seemed confident and happy while others remained silent. The bell rang loudly a few minutes before 11 A.M. and everyone rushed to the classrooms to occupy the seats assigned to them.

The seats in Room No. 3. I was to invigilate were immediately filled up. While I looked at each student, I noticed that all of them were gazing at me. There was only one girl in the room, the rest were boys. I also noticed three elderly men among them. A few minutes later I distributed the writing paper, and the question papers were still in my hand. While all eyes were on the question papers, these slipped from my hand and scattered on the floor. Prior to handing over the question paper to each student, I announced in a loud voice, "I do not wish to disgrace anyone here. So, if any of you has pieces of

written chits, you must give these to me now or throw them out of the window. If not, you will have to face the consequences."

The students looked at each other and said, "I don't have any pieces of paper with me." When the bell sounded to begin the examination, I gave out the question paper to each student. When I reached the last bench I stopped, as I distinctly remembered seeing the girl student somewhere before but I could not recollect when and where. While looking at her, I placed the question paper gently on the desk. She picked up the paper in a nervous, bashful manner which I liked very much. She then smiled displaying her pearly white teeth, and I was enchanted by her beauty.

I walked to and fro in the room while everyone was busy writing. But I noticed that the girl was simply turning over the question paper without beginning to write. At times she reflected with her lips moving, and also tried to remember her lessons with her eyes closed. She would also make various facial gestures and instantly write a few lines. But again she stops writing and scratches her face and hands. I concluded that she was totally unable to write anything.

After an hour I went round for their attendance signatures. I reached her desk and placed the attendance sheet in front of her. With her slender hand she wrote her roll number and signed the paper as Sabitā Chhetri. I was astonished as soon as I read her name. I did not know that she was from a Khas family. I was quite sure that she was a Newar girl. She looked exactly like a Shrestha girl.

I kept her name in mind as I was very inclined to speak to her privately sometime in the future. I stood directly in front of her with a longing look of endearment. Although I was standing a short distance away from her, I felt that she was physically close to me.

I continued to look at her like a drug addict. I then felt that someone else was looking at me. I looked away and walked to and fro,

but my eyes returned to gaze at her big eyes, dark eyebrows, and a nose and lips that perfectly matched her attractive face. She was wearing white trousers, a colorful blouse, and a flower-print scarf over the green woolen coat and a pair of attractive earrings. Her long finger nails were painted in red color. Her armpits were probably smelly as she had used strong doses of perfumes.

As soon as I turn my back to her, she kept glancing at me. I felt that she too was aware of my glances and I was thrilled by our attention and attraction for each other. I was then suddenly overcome by nervous fear ---- I had my wife and a child at home. I was overcome by guilty feelings, but at that moment I imagined that Sabitā Chhetri to be my wife. I was inclined to go and embrace her, but !

I was then overcome by suspicion. I was aware of her hands trembling and I was shocked when I happened to see pieces of paper in her hand. She was frightened when I went and stood in front of her. While writing with her head bowed down, she quietly hid the chits of paper inside her blouse. Instantly I grabbed the chits from her tight-fitting dress and threw them away. I took two steps back as she gazed at me in speechless surprise. Her face blushed and tears appeared in her eyes. I quickly recovered from the emotional shock and looked back to see the students busy in writing. I thought to myself: 'if she had cried out I would have been in a very embarrassing position But I would say that I was about to snatch the chits of paper from her and if I had touched her, it would not be my fault!' However I had a feeling of guilt when she got up and was about to speak, but she instantly changed her mind and sat down. She kept gazing at me in anger with wide open eyes. I then felt pity for her and was inclined to weep.

The bell finally rang after three hours, and I collected all the answer papers except her's. All the students had left the room but she continued to write. I would be in a fix if the Superintendent had entered the room, but try I might I could not snatch her answer copy.

She then stopped writing abruptly and stood up. She looked at me with hateful eyes, hurled the answer paper towards me and left the room. My hands trembled while I picked up the paper with her name and Roll No. 1234. I also noticed a small piece of paper with the answer paper on which she had written ---- 'What do you think of me? Do you know who I am? Wait and see I will tell my father and I will have you severely punished for your misconduct. If you need to look at my chits for copying, you can find them under the table. I dare you to punish me if you can, you shameless rascal!' As mentioned, I found the piece of paper for cheating. I was so frustrated by her insulting words that I could neither smile nor be angry.

After collecting all the papers, I rushed out of the room. I saw groups of students talking about the examination, some satisfied with the answers they had written while a few of them complained of having done badly while others were discussing about particular questions.

I looked around and happened to see Sabitā Chhetri standing near the gate. I was so furious about the insulting words she had written that I felt like spitting on her face for humiliating me. I never imagined that a beautiful woman like her could be so mean, and perhaps she too has the same feeling about me. But I concluded that she was by no means an ordinary woman.

At this time I saw a car with a folded national flag drive up and stop at the gate. As soon as the driver opened the door, she entered the car. In the car I could see another woman, most probably a milking nurse, who placed a baby on Sabitā's lap. When the car drove away, he happened to hear a student remark, "Did you see the puffed- up pride of a Minister's daughter!"

I felt as if I had fallen down from a wall. I was completely confused and my blood pressure increased as I watched the speeding car. I had no idea how long I stood there motionless like a statue, but I finally

realized why she had called me 'a shameless rascal and threatened to have me punished for misconduct.' In other words, we need to realize our own mistakes and weaknesses instead of blaming others at all times.

Sorrowful Life

It has been a long while since Mangal Maya had been suffering from the wasting disease of her thin, emaciated hand. The day before the merchant had sent word asking her to come early in the morning as they had urgent work to be done. She had never refused to obey her employer. She does the work assigned to her on every occasion despite her illness. That day too she had arrived early in the morning and sat down to roll the thread on the flywheel without a break. She completed winding five rolls of thread in no time, apart from short delays from knots on the thread or loss of the initial thread. She used to be annoyed by these delays and exclaim, "Just when I need to finish this work!" and pull the thread this way and that to vent her anger. In this mood she feels inclined to pull the rolls of thread into pieces. Just then she finds the head of the thread roll, smiles and continues with her work.

The day advanced with the rising sun as her friends too arrived to begin work. Everyone was busy in unwinding or rolling the thread on the flywheel, while some were waiting for lack of sticks with metal hooks or empty reels. Occasionally, Indralal used to address Mangal Maya as elder brother Mangal-dai in jest and said, "You don't seem to have eaten your lunch! Why, is today your day of fasting?" "No elder brother Indralal, not a day of full fasting but always half day fasting. We cannot help it....." she replied with a broad smile.

Indralal considered Mangal Maya's reply seriously as he was fully aware of her poverty-stricken condition. But what could he do! He was not in a position to help her, nor to share her grief and sorrow. He had spoken to her in a light-hearted manner, and he felt that he should not have done so. Indralal then gazed at her thin body and her sad bony face. She seemed to be a miniature person comparable to a character in Gulliver's Travels. He also recalled her telling him about her sad life with tears in her eyes. She had also told him about her childhood, the first born child in seven months considered to be auspicious, happy memories of her second birthday ritual, and how everyone admired her pretty face. "I used to sleep between my father and mother who kissed and hugged me in turn before I fell asleep. My parents showered their love and affection on me and I imagined myself to be the happiest girl in the world. My only wish is to be reborn in that happy family atmosphere."

While relating her story, Mangal Maya's face had a worn-out look. Her eyes overflowed with tears down her face and her mouth dried up. She then continued her story, "Later, a younger sister was born with a face much more beautiful than mine and heavier in body weight than me. We were both happy as we loved to play with dolls. One day we were playing a hip-hopping game with friends from the courtyard. I remember being accused of cheating by a girl from the neighborhood. She pushed me in anger and I fell down, landed on the stone slabs and hurt my face and chest. One of my teeth was broken and I was bleeding from the mouth and nose. I was frightened by the sight of blood and wept loudly. My younger sister was alarmed and she too started to weep. I was in a painful condition but my playmates simply watched and did not even help me to stand up. I was furious with their passive attitude, and tried to get up but could not do so. Then a shopkeeper nearby helped to reach me to my house. Later my father took me to a medical shop for treatment. The pharmacist

applied iodine solution on the painful parts of my body and gave me ten tablets. In the evening, I developed high fever and many parts of my body were painful. I was unable to move my body and the limbs. My father went out to buy some milk and porridge which I drank and ate like a starved person. I laid down to sleep but could not fall asleep due to the pain. I simply closed my eyes without sleeping.

A fortnight later there was no improvement in my health. I gradually lost weight, and was bed-ridden for several months. By this time I suffered from paralysis and my parents were confronted with a desperate situation. I then became a huge burden on my parents. My mother in particular wept continuously and suffered swelling of her eyes. I did not feel like living any more in the face of so much suffering both to myself and my parents. Apart from slight movements of my hands, my legs and my body were totally paralyzed. Any attempt to move my body or to go to the toilet caused severe pains. My parents and my sister had to make special arrangements to minimize my movements. Another inconvenience was that our house is located inside a lane without any sunlight, and the well nearby produces foul smell day and night. The tragedy of my condition was that my life has been reduced to a total wastage in the prime of my youth. According to our Newar tradition, a young boy and a young girl have to undergo a ritual related to coming-of-age ceremony. But all my dreams and aspirations have been reduced to ashes.

During the time of festivals, I hear the sound of flutes and beating of drums, the performance of religious dances and the singing of seasonal songs. I wish to go out and see the celebrations but all that I can do is to listen with tears in my eyes. My young sister sometimes comes to relate mythical tales and traditional stories, and I derive satisfaction in listening to her. I then fall asleep.

"In the morning, my sister comes with water and a bowl to wash my face, while my mother places before me a plate of coarse rice

and vegetable. I feel like weeping when I see the unappetizing food but I eat it to please my mother. The condition of our old house has deteriorated and is no longer safe but my parents do not have the resources for repairs. I need some tonic to maintain my health but we cannot afford this luxury. I do not wish to live any longer but also fear to die. Death is waiting by my side but I have not lived long enough to think of dying.

Time dragged on slowly from summer to winter, winter to summer. I had spent seven years of suffering and living in the eighth year of my life. My health has degraded to half of my previous body weight. I have stopped looking at the mirror, but when I happen to glance at the mirror the image of my face frightens me – my skeletal body, dirty hair, a grimy body that has not touched any water, smelly mattress, pillow and blanket. I continued to live in these depressing conditions, but a ray of hope finally entered my life. The ayurvedic medicines prepared by a physician named Hariharbājyā gradually began to improve my condition. He advised my mother to heat her hands before a fire and massage a lotion on my limbs and body every day. Gradually I was able to walk a few steps. I was overjoyed and regarded Hariharbājyā as a heaven-sent savior. Although I was not cured completely, I felt that I was reborn to a new life."

"Elder brother Indralal, please take these four rolls of thread which I have just completed. Why are you staring at me like that?" While coughing, Mangal Maya said, "You have tears in your eyes! Perhaps you remember the sad story of my life, isn't that true, Elder brother Indralal? You know very well how difficult life can be. I am working here in order to survive." Indralal was taken by surprise as he remembered the story of her life. He sighed and without a single word in reply, picked up the thread rolls and walked away.

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Indralal always assigned the work of spinning the thread to Mangal Maya and not others. He obviously liked her very much. Perhaps this was because he had no younger sisters, or his awareness of her poverty. Whatever the reason, he regarded her as his own younger sister and loved her as such.

One day, Indralal arrived to work very late. He went up to meet Mangal Maya but was surprised to find that she was absent. He assumed that perhaps she had gone to eat her lunch. He deposited the new thread reels at her workplace together with three sweet citrus fruits leftovers from the previous day's ritual worship of younger brother during the Tihar (Sunti) festival. She and the other workers must have taken the day off during the festive season. Indralal was disappointed and annoyed for not meeting her. He then heard the drum beats of a funeral band and saw people take off their caps in respect of the dead person. As the funeral procession came closer, Indralal was shocked to see Mangal Maya's father weeping. In a faint voice, he whispered - "Mangal Maya!" He could not believe his eyes and his ears, but he was confronted with reality. He was not prepared to believe that a young girl who had not undergone the coming-of-age ritual would be taken in a funeral procession with drum beats. He however had to accept the truth that Mangal Maya he recognized as his younger sister had passed away. When he saw the corpse covered with a brocade cloth, tears rolled down his face profusely. He kept gazing till the procession was no longer visible.

Indralal could not control his emotional outburst as he visualized the sad face of Mangal Maya, her manner of speech and the dedication to her work. With tears in his eyes, Indralal recollected the words she had spoken, her kind and gentle personality and her friendship with co-workers. Now that she had passed away at her young age, Indralal gazed at the fly wheel that she used to spin the thread. He could see a flow of oil from the joint of the fly wheel which he imagined to be

tears from the eyes of Mangal Maya. Indralal sat down abruptly and his hand gently caressed the equipment she had used. He then wiped away the oil with a corner of his dress, leaving a long dark stain on the cloth. He then rubbed this dark stain on his cheeks and continued to rub it in a frantic manner.

Sister Bandanā

Sister Bandanā is on night duty today. It has been two months since she had come to like doing night duty. She alone knows why she has begun to have this preference. Other staff members hate night duties like poison, but she is happy to do it. In fact she looks forward to night fall. She puts on her white gown long before her duty time. But that day her mind seemed to be disturbed with uneasy feelings. She felt like weeping as she was overcome with anxiety, a headache and feverish state of health. She did not know why she was overcome by such feelings. She got up abruptly from the window seat as she did not feel like staying in the room, and went up to the terrace. The hospital had been constructed in the memory of someone. She felt alone even in that spacious compound. She sighed several times as she looked around her. In the front was a big garden with a multitude of flowers. Previously she used to admire those beautiful flowers, but that evening she was unable to appreciate their sweet fragrance. She also ignored the well cultivated vegetable garden, and was unable to admire the beauty of the Snow Mountains in the distance. She felt irritated and her body shivered as she gazed at the dark river. She realized that there no difference between her and the river – both were isolated without parents, sister or any family member. I am an orphan and there is no one to listen to my story. I was born and brought up in this maternity hospital and appointed here as a Sister. Why do I feel

frustrated and dejected today! "Oh yes, I think today is the mother's day!"

Tears were rolling down her cheeks. She went and sat down on a low wall. It was already dark as she looked at her watch. She still had one hour left to begin her duty. She was assigned to attend to several patients today, some in labor pains and others who have already delivered their babies. She again gazed at the newly built bridge where many polluting vehicles were passing to and fro. At that moment, someone came up the stairs and Bandanā quickly wiped her tears. The person who approached her happened to be elder sister Maiju, a matron and a close friend. She said, "I have been looking all over for you. I asked several people but none of them had seen you. How would they know that you are here at the terrace?" Maiju then gave her a cup of coffee and said, "This coffee is getting cold, and I know that you prefer hot coffee." Bandanā took the cup and drank the coffee in one gulp as Maiju looked at her in surprise. She returned the cup and asked, "Elder sister Maiju, isn't today the Mothers' Day?"

"Yes, it is" Maiju replied abruptly.

Bandanā with tears in her eyes exclaimed, "Yes, today is Mother's Day. Everyone honors his or her mother with sweetmeats, but I am a daughter who does not even know her own mother. Elder sister Maiju, you once told me a story about my late mother. Please relate to me that story, I beg of you."

Maiju however knew that to tell her the story would not be appropriate on that particular day, and replied, "Bandanā, you know very well that I had told you this story several times and I do not wish to repeat it. You seem to be upset today. Is there any use of remembering what is past! This will only add to your sorrow."

"No, elder sister Maiju, I do not mean in that way. I do remember all the details of the story, but I have a strong wish to listen to you one

more time. You will receive a spiritual blessing if you agree to fulfill my wish."

Maiju was in a dilemma: she could neither consent nor agree to her earnest request. If she refuses, Bandanā would be greatly disappointed. When she had related the story previously, Bandanā had wept bitterly and she therefore could not make up her mind. This situation even brought tears to her eyes. She reflected for a while, but was unable to come to a decision. She then thought of an excuse and said, "I am not sure if the kitchen staff have served the evening meal to the patients downstairs. I have to go and check, but I shall tell the story later. You know very well the ill-tempered behavior of our Head Matron. She wiped her tears on her way down to the medical ward. Bandanā however was disappointed and speechless. She stood up abruptly in anger, walked a few steps and stopped. In the distance she happened to see the cremation ground situated in a lonely place. In the dim light she seemed to see the body of her dead mother. As she kept on gazing, she imagined a slight movement of the corpse. 'She must have been brought to this very place. My mother had died an untimely death.' She then remembered her father. 'Who could he be? He is not my father, not my father! He is the murderer of my mother. He is the one who sent my mother to hell.' Bandanā grinded her teeth in blind fury as she remembered all the details of the story related to her by elder sister Maiju. She began to hate herself for being the victim of blood relation with her father and wished to break off that bond forever. She began to shiver as she went up and circled around the terrace aimlessly.

The headlight from a passing car startled her. The vehicle was an ambulance with the noise of a siren. The ambulance entered the hospital compound. She looked at her watch and as it was five minutes past nine, she hurriedly put on her gown and rushed down to attend to her duty at the Operation Theatre. As soon as she entered the theatre she felt a strange smell. The big lamps were as bright as daylight, the heater

and the surgical instruments laid out on the table. She experienced a queer feeling as the nurses entered with a patient on a stretcher. Bandanā went forward to help the nurses to lay the patient on the table, to clean the parts of the body and to give anesthesia injections. Dr. Madālasā Pandey and Dr. Gyānu Joshi then entered hurriedly to perform the Cesarean surgery. The attending nurses put on their masks to cover nose and mouth. Bandanā handed over the scalpel knife to Dr. Pandey, while Dr. Joshi was holding an artery forceps. As Dr. Joshi was about to cut open the stomach, Bandanā could not watch any longer. She closed her eyes tightly and began to breathe heavily. Her heartbeat increased so rapidly that she feared a heart failure. Her whole body was in perspiration and experienced a sense of giddiness as if the whole theatre was revolving around her. Her hands trembled while handing over the instruments to the doctor. Dr. Pandey being aware of the situation, signaled with his eyes for Sister Jamunā to replace Bandanā. She sat down on the chair and remembered that her mother had been to this very theatre for an operation to open the blocked passage of delivery. Four days later, her mother had passed away. How could she ever forget that tragic misfortune!

The operation was over after almost an hour, but Bandanā continued to sit on that chair. She regained her senses when Dr. Pandey touched her shoulder and said, "Sister Bandanā, you should not be weak like this. You need to be mentally strong."

The theatre was then empty as Bandanā got up slowly. She happened to see eight or ten drops of blood on the table. She felt that those were the blood of her own mother. She remembered the doctor telling her that the operation was successful. She was told that the baby's weight was about five pounds. "What a stupid person I was! I even forgot to see if the baby was male or female. Perhaps the child looked like me and born in the same way as I." Bandanā felt her mouth dry up. Everyone had gone to sleep, and the nature too seemed

to have dried up. The only sound she could hear was the continuous creaking of insects. Bandanā too felt sleepy in spite of her night duty but she knew that she should not fall asleep. She went from room to room to inspect the patients. She examined the chart of each patient and followed the doctor's instructions to give glucose injections or administer medicines. She arrived at the General Ward and gazed at the patients lying down in rows like corpses, and next to each woman a new born child. The babies occasionally cried out in a group or kept silent the next moment. She was looking for something in the ward, and noticed her favorite free bed No. 41 for rest during the night. She was relieved to see that the bed was empty. She looked around and noticed that everyone had fallen asleep. She gazed closely at the bed covered with a reddish sheet and realized that it was the very bed on which her mother was tortured with so much pain and suffering before she died. She imagined that the invisible spirit of her mother still remains in the bed. In that frame of mind, she even felt that her mother was lying there and feeding milk to her new born daughter Bandanā. She then got up and slowly lay down on the bed, covered her body with a blanket and put her index finger in her mouth. She sucked her finger as if drinking her mother's milk. Just as a child who cries when hungry, tears were flowing from her eyes. She felt that she was finally on her mother's lap, and her mind rested in peace.

Disguised Morality

I was about to cross the Nursing Home on my way to the school. I stopped abruptly when I saw a large crowd of people at the gate. I was curious to know what was happening. I looked at my watch which indicated ten minutes to ten. I wasn't sure if I could reach the school on time as I had to reach the Tāhāchal locality. While walking hurriedly, I assumed that someone had died in an accident. But I noticed that the people coming out of the gate were smiling and not in a sorrowful mood. As I could not understand the situation, I decided to enter the gate despite my hurry and take a casual day off if I have to. I then entered the gate and walked along with the others. I was about to ask someone, but decided not to. I saw groups of people in animate conversations and I was curious to know what they were talking about. I soon came to know that it was a simple matter that had taken place the day earlier. I learnt that a young Buddhist nun had almost died after consuming sleeping tablets. If she had not been made to vomit on time, she would probably have died. I too felt like laughing when I visualized the few monks and nuns I knew. These disciples of the Buddha, I felt, were disgracing their religious beliefs and practices. Most probably that young nun had attempted suicide because she was pregnant. What other reason could there be! While reflecting on this probability, the gate keepers were trying to drive away the crowd of people, and refused to allow anyone in. Everyone there wished to

see the face of the victim. I too made my way through the crowd and reached the gate. It was summer time and I was sweating profusely. My armpits then spread foul smells and those nearby had to cover their noses with handkerchiefs, while I smiled apologetically.

The window of the room where the nun was lying down was hardly transparent, and the onlookers were disappointed when a curtain was drawn over it. The curious spectators gradually left, but I remained as I was determined to have a look at the face of this nun with a suicidal motive. As a last resort I announced to the gate keeper that I was an Upaasak, a novice monk, and quickly entered the room. As soon as I laid eyes on this woman, this nun with dark spots on the face, I was petrified, my entire body heated up and I was speechless. I could not believe my eyes as she kept staring at me. I was then overcome with sympathy for this unfortunate nun as I had known her intimately for many years. We had also shared meals together and slept in the same room. She was once my wife and she had bowed down to touch my feet hundreds of times.

The other day I came home late from my friend's marriage procession. It was 1 o'clock after midnight. Some of the street lights were on but the streets were quite dark. The sky was cloudy and looked like rain while the wind was blowing with a whistling noise. I walked on talking to a casual friend on useless matters. At Sināmangal locality he went off in a different direction while I walked on towards Dillibazār area. I was left alone at this late hour and became quite apprehensive about my safety. The lightening flashed followed by a fearful blast of thunder. The lightening must have struck somewhere nearby, and the rain again came down in big drops while I walked on hurriedly. I covered my head with a handkerchief, but soon I was completely wet. I finally reached home, unlocked the door and went up to my room. I was alarmed when I found the bed, mattress and clothes were soaking wet. I quickly shut the window and saw her fast asleep on the second

bed. Normally she does not sleep till I arrive and I was quite annoyed. I removed my wet clothes and before I lay down on my bed I looked at her hoping for an intimate moment with her. She is after all my wife and there is nothing wrong in asserting our romantic relationship. So I pulled her towards me and embraced her. She however refused to comply with my amorous advances and started to weep.

In an angry mood I said, "You are not indispensable here. Do you understand? I can always find someone to cook and wash clothes and the dishes. I have not married you for nothing. Try to understand a man's point of view."

When she refused to change her mind, my temper subsided. After all, she was not guilty of anything. At the time of our marriage she told me that her father had passed away when she was ten years old, and her mother died suddenly a year ago. She had refused at the time to be given away in marriage due to an epidemic that caused the death of several children including her elder sister. She had thus suffered from fits of hysteria whenever her marriage was mentioned. Only the other day, I learnt that she had never experienced her monthly period. How would she then conceive a child! If she had made up her mind not to conceive a child, nothing more needs to be said about this matter. But I am not certain if I should be happy or disappointed by such a decision.

As she continued to weep, my eyes too were wet with tears. I lay on the bed and said to her, "Minu, I do not need to say this to you as you are fully aware of my condition. I have known for many years about your menstrual problem but I have not revealed this to anyone. You had also insisted that I re-marry but how can I face the social criticisms of discarding you like a useless object? So Minu, I have changed my mind and I will not listen to anyone. Let them say whatever they wish to because this is about my Life, and I have the sole right to decide on

my future. I have thus decided to divorce you." She slowly stopped to weep, lifted up her head and in a hoarse voice replied, "I agree." That night passed away peacefully.

The divorce papers were approved and signed within four days. The neighbors were all shocked including her parents. She refused to take away her wedding gifts, handed them over to me and before leaving she said, "Please give this diamond ring to your new bride" and placed it on my hand. She bowed down to my feet with eyes full of tears and left the house forever. I had no idea where she went to. Within two or three months I married for the second time. Several days later I came to know from a friend of mine that she had shaved her hair completely and put on a yellow robe of a nun.

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Someone asked me to move aside as I was standing in the middle of the passage. I then walked towards the Private Cabin of the Emergency Ward. I saw there a group of ten or twelve monks and nuns. A young female doctor called aside a monk and said, "The x-ray report does not show any sign of pregnancy. We had suspected that she must have taken the Phenobarbital tablets, but we found that she had not. So what was the cause of her attempted suicide? There is also no indication that she is suffering from any incurable disease. This is indeed a very strange case!" The doctor continued to look at the patient's face in a thoughtful manner.

"What could be the actual reason for consuming those medicines? I was mystified by that question as I could not find a clue to the mystery. The nun kept gazing at me with her lips moving as if she wanted to tell me something. I went and stood in front of her and tried to console her, "You should not weep in this way. What will others say?"

She however wept in an emotional manner. I then went near to her and asked a question. She placed her lips near to my ears and said

something. I then requested everyone to leave the room, and they all went out. The nun looked around the room and said with tears in her eyes, "Your wife Minu has now become a nun, and I was compelled to stay here in this condition. I was a nun but I am no longer a nun now. I keep remembering the face of Tathāgata Buddha, but I am now ashamed to show my face to anyone. I never dreamt that I would be degraded to this condition. I would like to tell you everything about my life, but not to anyone else. But what is the use of telling you! The yellow robe of a nun I am wearing will never be purified."

Her face was bluish in complexion with staring eyes, and a trembling voice. I kept on insisting that she speak up. Finally she said, "Take this diary and read through it, although I should not have written it! I meant it to be read only when I have passed away that is the reason why I wrote it. If I had not written it, this would remain a burden to you and to me. But I don't have the courage to tell you now. They should have allowed me to die peacefully, but they chose to revive me."

Having spoken those words, she produced from her waist a small diary and gave it to me. I turned its pages rapidly and read from the page she indicated: "The 4th day of Thinlā (November-December). Yesterday a renowned Buddhist monk from Burma (Myanmar) arrived in Nepal. I was invited to attend an evening function to welcome the visiting monk at the Buddhist monastery. I did not go as I was suffering from a headache. I was told that all the monks and nuns were present. I was in the monastery room trying to relieve my headache with a piece of wet cloth. I then happened to hear Kaylan monk calling me. I assumed that the monk had gone to attend the function. I also assumed that he would not go as he had told me in the morning that he was suffering from a toothache. But I also guessed that he would not miss the function to welcome the honorable guest. I went to meet him in his room despite my splitting headache.

"Do you also have a headache? Sorry to disturb you, but I called you to boil some water for me. If you cannot, you can leave. I will boil the water myself." As Kalyan monk said this, I regarded it to be my duty and went to the kitchen to boil the water. The stove however did not function properly and it took some time to boil the water. At that moment, someone from behind pulled me forcefully. I was terrified when the person embraced me tightly. I struggled, cried out and tried to run away but there was no one to hear me. I then realized the attacker was no other than Kalyan monk. I bit his hand which caused a deep, bleeding wound. I never realized that Kalyan monk was such an immoral and hateful person. After he molested me, he warned me, "If you mention this to anyone, I will tear you apart. Even if you tell anyone, it will be you who will be disgraced, not me." He then dragged me and left me in my room in a helpless condition. My body was aching all over, and I was unable to stand up. I wept the whole night, and when I managed to stagger to my feet, I got hold of the bottle of sleeping tablets Phenobarbital, and then And then"

I was devastated while reading the diary. I grinded my teeth, clenched my fingers and my whole body trembled. I then made a commitment and said, "Minu (as I was not aware of her new name), this is a serious matter and cannot be kept confidential. That monk had warned you not to tell anyone and if you did he would tear you apart. No, he will not do that because I will tear him apart. Do not worry because I will definitely take revenge. He has disgraced his religious vow as a monk, and such persons must be ostracized from our society permanently." She however appealed to me not to take drastic action, but I left the cabin and went to meet the monks and nuns assembled on the corridor of the hospital and read out to them the contents of Minu's diary. All of them were shocked when they came to realize that the hospitalized nun was a victim of a sexual attack by a monk of the same monastic order. The rumors about a nun's attempt to commit

suicide now became a reality when Kalyan monk was named as the culprit. After leaving two attendants with Minu, I left the hospital with the group of monks and nuns all of whom were in a state of confused shock and anger. As soon as we reached the monastery office, a meeting was held and a decision was announced to expel Kalyan Sthavir from the order. The laymen who were present, however, were not satisfied with the decision and cried out: "Kalyan Sthavir must be severely punished. Bring him here and we want to see him disrobed of his position as a monk. If not we will expose and attack this entire monastic order." The crowd then chanted the slogan: "Disrobe Kalyan Sthavir Disrobe Kalyan Sthavir!!"

All the members of the congregation were in a state of fear. Half an hour later, two monks brought Kalyan Sthavir to the meeting hall. As soon as the crowd saw the accused, they spit on him and some of them shouted, "You shameless monk! You are a disgraceful monk! You deserve the death penalty!" The crowd of spectators increased in a dusty atmosphere, and the policemen on guard were hopelessly confused. As the situation seemed to turn into a protest rally, they found it difficult to bring Kalyan Sthavir into the office. A few minutes later Kalyan was made to stand outside the office and the large crowd responded with loud claps and slogans. Kalyan Sthavir then ceased to be Kalyan Sthavir. His monastic robe was removed and made to wear an over-sized dark colored national dress which exposed his thin body. His head was bowed down in shame while I went forward and slapped his face. He did not even lift his head to look at me. I could see tears running down his face and his wet dress. The people assembled there stared at him in contempt while he stood there motionless with no sign of normal breathing. While I continued to stare at him with intense feelings of hate and repulsion, I visualized the dark spots on Minu's face, the dark spots on the face of the nun.

The Story of Life: An Opera

The story of life reads like a book. I remember vividly the program that took place at the National Theatre Hall illuminated with colorful lights and a crowded entrance gate. I could see many anxious people without tickets, and others with tickets unable to enter due to the congestion at the gate. The policemen were frantically checking and allowing people with tickets to enter. The opera program was to begin at 7 p.m. sharp, and it was already six thirty. The crowded scene hardly subsided with many people still struggling to move forward. Perhaps they were waiting for my arrival. Before the car could reach the gate, a large number of people surrounded the vehicle in all directions, many of them peering in through the window pane with folded hands in greeting. I too responded likewise and while clapped, but my car could not enter the compound. I was wearing a military uniform which suited me very well, but the crowd still blocked my passage. I had to freshen myself before the program. I kept looking at my watch but could not make my way through the crowd. The policemen on duty finally recognized my red car with a special horn and tried to disperse the crowd but failed to do so. Then a handsome looking person came close to the window and said, "Miss Sangita, how can we allow you to pass through. They had not sold more than ten tickets and they have put up a 'House Full' sign at the gate. We cannot allow you to enter until they agree to issue more tickets."

I felt that the person had spoken correctly. But I feel like laughing when men try to fool around with women. In reply I assured them, "If there are some tickets inside, I shall certainly try to have them issued to you. Please believe me, I am not trying to deceive you." They then cleared the way instantly, as someone in a teasing voice remarked, "Miss Sangita, How beautiful you are! By God, too much Sweetie you are, my dear! Thank you! Thank you!" and I nodded my head in response.

My car managed to enter the gate with much difficulty. I spoke to the Director to fulfill my promise to the people outside. As there were no more seats, they did not mind standing to enjoy the show. As I freshened up with my makeup, the opera began on time. As the curtain opened with the sound of music, there was complete silence in the hall. As I was the chief actress at the program, I realized that it was necessary not merely to deliver the dialogue but to understand the role and experiences of a performer. I thus concluded my performance, but "The Director is an idiot! Idiotic Director!"

I returned to my small cottage with a small garden and the sweet smell of flowers. I was about to pluck the flowers but I resisted my impulse to do so. I felt that this would be like killing a part of nature. I moved away and noticed the hard soil for want of moisture. I had forgotten to water the plants that day. I then got hold of the rubber pipe and watered all the plants. I looked at the round-shaped pond with a miniature stone temple submerged in the pond and noticed the greenish water. I kept gazing at the four tiny figures of the Buddha holding miniature bowls. I compared my life to that of the Vipaswi Buddha, and perhaps like the fish and the miniature temple. I decided that I would not go to the national theatre that day under any condition. I am not bound to obey anyone, not even the Director. If he has made me Sangitā a star performer, I would think twice. But he has taken advantage of me because I am a woman.

..... I am a military personnel and committed to fight against friends or enemies to defend the country. If the Director himself becomes my enemy and threatens to attack me, I too will be prepared to meet the challenge despite my limitations as a woman. I visualize a bloody battlefield where the enemy attacks me with a sword and blood oozes out from the wound on my waist. The sword drops from my hand, but I am not prepared to surrender. I hold on to the crest of the national flag on my uniform lest the enemies get hold of it. I then cry out 'Long live my Motherland!' That is all I can say, but he seeks to prevent my right to free speech. Is there anyone here who can suppress our mind? He attempts once more to attack me with his sword. I find myself in a desperate condition when he drags me and tears off my clothes with nothing more than a brassiere and a panty. He then attempts to attack me sexually, touching or pretending to touch various parts of my body. I then stop to breathe and turn myself into a martyr. The onlookers are very alarmed with overflow of tears. I then hear loud sounds of clapping. The onlookers express sympathy to me and protest to my enemies. The main theme of my acting is devoted to this dramatic episode. The curtain should have dropped at the end of the opera. But ... but That obnoxious Director groped my body with his dirty hands. I did not wish to degrade my acting and so refrained from slapping his face with anger and hatred. My friends and co-actors were also very disappointed. I was at a loss to know what I should do. My face was flushed with anger. When the curtain finally closed fully, I got up and left the place without even changing my costumes.

I strolled around the fish pond, determined not to go to the theatre. I am least concerned whether the performance is a success or a failure. What difference would it make to my income if I am absent for one day! Actually, I have worked much harder than the income I receive. So then? So then?

The two eyes of the Buddhist stupa in the distance seemed to be staring at me. The sign representing the nose appeared to be a question mark. The ascending metal circles on the stupa appeared to be symbols of my aspirations in life. Isn't the Mahāboudha stupa a symbol of my life and my soul? Will our life have any value without a soul? So who am I, Sangeeta! Yes, I am Sangeeta, but that is merely my name as an opera actress, not my real name. My real name is my soul and my breath. When I cease to exist, how can Sangita survive? The change from physical to abstract is a natural process of our lives. This transformation is a part of our existence, and if not what is the reality of our lives? Butnot at the cost of our moral character.

I hear the Tibetan lamas reciting their prayers in hoarse voices accompanied by the beat of small hand drums. My sharp eyes located the Mana:harā river. The wide roads resembled the Mana:harā River, and I felt that there was life in the road and the river like the flowing hair of women after bathing. Towards the north I could see large stretches of agricultural land in the proximity of Budhanilkantha temple. The atmosphere in the distance appeared to be very dusty, but at the same time I was enchanted by the Snow Mountains in the north. I was startled when I heard the footsteps of my driver. I did not realize that it was late in the evening. I was sitting on the concrete chair near the pond. I got up abruptly and arranged my saree while I wiped away the dust.

"Do you wish to drink your coffee first? It is time to go to the theatre."

"I am not in the mood today to go to the theatre. I am not feeling well." In an annoyed voice I said, "You leave the car in the garage."

"How can the show be held if Madam does not go?" The driver said with hesitation.

"The show will be a complete failure if I don't go. Why are you concerned about the success or failure of the show? Just leave the car in the garage. Wait a minute! As I told you the other day, take with you a sweater and a saree for your wife. I will be back immediately."

I rushed to my room while the driver waited outside. I picked up the sweater and the saree and came out quickly. Actually, I had wished to give these gifts to his wife a long time ago but was unable to do so. I wrapped up the gifts and gave it to him. As I had requested, he placed the car in the garage and left with a smile on his face. He must have thanked me silently, but one cannot be certain about other people's state of mind. But I am quite certain he is grateful for my kindness.

The sky may be overcast but my room and my garden are not dark. The garden looks attractive with the lights on. I was on the steps of the veranda and I could see clearly the dazzling lights of Kathmandu. The pinnacle of Swoyambhu stupa appeared to be a fallen star. The Narayanhiti royal palace was nearby, and I assumed that the bright lights at the distance may be that of Annapurna and Soalti Hotels. The lights in front of the clock tower were obviously that of the National Theatre. But what is the use of speculating on these trivial matters! I will not go there today under any condition. I turned around and entered the dining room. The maid was alone in the kitchen preparing a palāu dish for dinner. I was hungry and the smell of the palāu made my mouth water. I suddenly remembered the beggars on the streets. I pity them because they cannot afford to buy any food. I then did not feel like eating the palāu. I felt as if I have deprived them of food to satisfy my hunger.

"I do not want to eat any of this palāu. You can eat the whole lot, or give some of it to any beggar who happens to come here."

I left the kitchen and went directly to my bedroom. As I entered the telephone rang. I felt that it could be from the National Theatre.

I picked up the receiver reluctantly and someone asked "Is Sangita madam at home?"

"Yes, this is Sangita speaking." I regretted my hasty response and asked, "Who is speaking please?"

"I am Suman. My greetings. As you have not yet arrived, the Director asked me to contact you. I had phoned you several times but I kept on hearing only the engage tone. You need to come immediately. Today too we have a full house. There is a large crowd of people in the audience, more than yesterday. As you know, today is our last performance. We are also aware that all your opera performances have been highly successful."

"Please inform the Director that I will not be coming today. I am busy today, and I am not feeling well." Without listening to any more remarks by Suman, I was about to put the phone down when he called out, "Sangita Madam? Sangita Madam?" in a loud voice but I did not respond and put the phone down. A minute later, the phone rang again. I did not pick up the phone but kept listening to the ring tones. I felt like laughing, and in a light-hearted mood I realized that I finally had my revenge. The phone was still ringing but I did not pick it up, and a few minutes later it stopped ringing. Then in my mind's eye I visualized the angry audience breaking the chairs when the show is cancelled. Some of them may have also thrown bricks and bottles on the stage. They would have demanded the refund of their money by chasing the Director with the half tickets in their hands. Others may have also arranged for petrol to be brought to burn down the theatre. The Director, I felt, deserved to be punished in this way. What did he take me for? He probably regarded me as a harmless ordinary woman!

I then heard the sound of a car outside. "Yes, this is the place she was brought." Perhaps the Director himself has come to plead with me. I will first make him bow down to my feet. I then heard the door

bell ringing, while I walked slowly towards the gate. Outside I saw Suman, the Secretary of the Director. He seemed to be in a nervous state, with a tearful face.

"Mr. Suman, Sangita will not come today. Apart from Sangita as an actress, she is also a woman." I said to him in protest.

"Please do not refuse, I beg of you. The Director is in a critical situation. If the performance does not take place, I don't need to tell you of the consequences. The spectators are raising their voices of opposition. The Director has asked me to convey his apologies."

"But I refuse to perform under his direction," I replied in a stern voice.

"Why are you saying this? How can anyone take your place at this time?" Suman replied in a frustrated manner.

I failed to understand myself when I instantly instructed the house maid to look after her household duties, and hurried to sit in the car brought by Suman. The car speeded up and reached the National Theatre in record time. There was a large crowd at the gate and it was difficult to get through. We then reached the theatre room where I changed my costume immediately, but I refused to be beautified by the make-up artists. The Director sat on the piano seat and gazed at me with an amazed look on his face. I however pretended not to notice him. The spectators outside were raising their voices in an alarming manner. The announcer then raised his microphone, the band began to play and the curtain opened slowly. There was complete silence in the hall.

When the curtain opened slowly, I was tense and a bit nervous. I had never felt this way before, and I wondered why? I did not have an answer as I stepped out on the stage. I realized that my acting today would not be as good as before. The reason obviously was due

to my negative relations with the Director whom I now regarded as my enemy. I therefore did not perform according to his directions and acted according to my own style. The dramatic action in the play seemed to match my mood of revenge when I raised my dagger and slapped the enemy on the cheek several times. The enemy, in a state of panic, grasped my hand and tried to kill me but I escaped from his clutches and jumped down from the stage. The entire audience was mute, while I walked out rapidly where a large number of people who did not have the tickets were completely astonished on seeing me. I got into a taxi and dismissed from my mind what may have happened at the theatre. Although I meet a tragic end in the opera, I was overjoyed that I managed to destroy my enemy. I smiled and rejoiced at the first victory in my life.

The car sped away at high speed.

Renown for descriptive narrative, Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar is recognized as a milestone in the development of modern Nepal Bhasa literature. His short stories hold a mirror up to the social issues and problems of contemporary Newar society.



"*Mijalā* by Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar marks the development of prose fiction in the Nepal Bhasa literature. This is indeed a matter of satisfaction as this trend provides a firm basis for further scope in the proliferation of the narrative genre in the language. ... His description of the psychological depth of characters in emotional situations has proved to be impressive as well as effective."

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